

HOW THE DENOMINATIONAL CHAPLAIN CAN
CONTACT THE MEMBERS OF HIS DENOMINATION
AND UPDATE THEIR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Chaplain (MAJ) William F. Peterson
Fort Hamilton, New York
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PROLOGUE

What you are about to read is a scenario. It is my hypothesis of a Chaplain's plan for contacting his denomination and arranging a program to update the religious education of the individual members of his congregation. In preparing this paper, I made a number of assumptions which I feel are valid under the described circumstances. I consider the proposed Program as a good and workable one. While I have outlined it in the pattern of my own denomination (Roman Catholic), I believe the organizational plan is such that other denominations would find it operative also.

INTRODUCTION

My name is Chaplain (COL) William F. Peterson. I am a Catholic. I am currently the Post Chaplain at Fort Emerson. My assignment began about six months ago.

I arrived here from Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where I was the Deputy Post Chaplain. Fort Sam was a well-managed myriad of military groups. There were advanced training schools for both officers and enlisted men at the Academy of Health Science; medical support units at the Brooke Army Medical Center and Brooke General Hospital; and operations units at the Post and Fifth Army Headquarters. It was a bit of a jungle to path through.

I like it here at Fort Emerson. I have always enjoyed an assignment in the mid-Atlantic States' area, especially in the Springtime. I consider Fort Emerson a well-structured and efficiently-organized military post. I was disappointed, however, with certain aspects of the Religious Education Program that were offered here and I hoped to do what I could to improve the picture for the future.

The Religious Education Program that existed at the time of my arrival was divided into three major sections: Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. My initial evaluation as to the effectiveness of the work of each group suggested the following:

- (a) The Jewish Program - appeared to be well-organized to meet the needs of its congregation; it received the support of the Jewish military community; Rabbi Tierney was doing a most acceptable job.
- (b) The Protestant Program - seemed to have a highly-motivated curriculum; it was supervised by the Deputy Post Chaplain, LTC Mark Breen. Mark is an outstanding Southern Baptist Chaplain who has a fine background in the overview of contemporary Protestant trends.
- (c) The Catholic Program - failed to meet acceptable standards; it lacked leadership and, as a result, suffered dwindling support from its members. Whatever interest was displayed seemed to be dispersed because of inadequate direction.

After thus assessing the Religious Education Program at Fort Emerson, I decided to personally direct the renewal of the Catholic operation and to coordinate the functions of all three major units of the religious community. Clearly, my work as Post Chaplain of Fort Emerson seemed to be outlined for me.

THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Background

When I first arrived at Fort Emerson, I was made aware of the difficulties under which the Religious Education Program was laboring. The previous Post Chaplain had been ailing for some time and the administration of the Program was delegated to Chaplain (LTC) Richard McPartlin. Chaplain McPartlin managed well with assistance and support from the Jewish and Protestant sections. However, his own Catholic section suffered because of the increased demands of the entire Program on his time and energy.

The lack of necessary manpower was the primary cause of the problem in the past and the situation was not too promising for the future. At the time, the total complement of Catholic Chaplains was three. Chaplain McPartlin had departed for the War College; Chaplain Furman Twaki of the First Brigade and Chaplain Dwight James of the Third Brigade were both on orders and were scheduled to depart within the next six months. I had been assured of only one replacement.

I decided to make the necessary plans to rejuvenate the Catholic Program and to allow for contingency changes in the future. We would get started and cross the bridges when we come to them.

Preparation

Updating the religious education of a denominational congregation

is not simply a good thing. It is a necessary function for the preservation and propagation of the Faith. Education is one of the most important ways by which the Church fulfills its commitment to the dignity of the person and the building of the community.

Fathers Twaki and James did much to cultivate the spirit that is so necessary to renewal. From the training brigades and the dependents' chapels, we felt the enthusiasm and sensed the interest of Catholics in learning more about their Faith and in participating in a formal program of religious education.

To support us in our commitment to this change, we had only to refer to highlights of the text of the recent statements of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' in their major pastoral message, "To Teach As Jesus Did":

"Community is at the heart of Christian education... From a Christian perspective, integral personal growth, even growth in grace and the spiritual life, is not possible without integral social life. To understand this is a high form of learning; to foster such understanding is a crucial task of education."¹

"The continuing education of adults is situated not at the periphery of the Church's educational mission, but at its center... programs must be planned and conducted in ways that emphasize self-direction, dialogue and mutual responsibility."²

"Catholic education is an expression of the mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church he founded. Through education the Church seeks to prepare its members to proclaim the Good News and to translate this proclamation

into action. Since the Christian vocation is a call to transform oneself and society with God's help, the educational efforts of the Church must encompass the twin purposes of personal sanctification and social reform in light of Christian values."³

The Catholic community of Fort Emerson was invited to participate in the planning stages of the new Religious Education Program. The response was gratifying. From the group who came forward to help, we were able to form a council of leaders whose backgrounds would prove beneficial to the promotion of a successful Program. The Council members and the three Catholic Chaplains held a series of meeting in which they discussed their objectives, evaluated their resources, and proposed plans of action.

I had written to a seminary classmate, Monsignor Chet Lindsey, who is now pastor of a large parish in the suburbs of Baltimore, Maryland. Under Chet's direction, the parish had just completed the first year of a most successful religious education program. He forwarded an outline of the program and suggested we might like to use it in our planning discussions. I reviewed the outline and liked its format. I presented it to the Council and they adopted it as the basis of their program. The proposal was called, "Growth In Faith Together". We called it GIFT and we were prepared to offer our GIFT to the entire Catholic community of Fort Emerson.

Organization

GIFT has three major areas of immediate involvement:

1. Research - surveys covering areas of religious concern are filled out and returned by the congregation.
2. Reflection - participants meet weekly for six weeks for discussions on major topics.
3. Response - education sessions and worship services are scheduled daily for two consecutive weeks and represent a range of Catholic expression.

Through Research, GIFT gave the congregation the opportunity to tell us what they considered to be the major areas of belief/doubt; agreement/disagreement; interest and/or lack of concern. Depending upon their responses to the survey questionnaire, we would be able to formulate a teaching agenda for the Religious Education Program.

Through Reflection, GIFT brought together the Christian teachers and lay leaders in a symposium setting with the concerned congregation. The major religious issues were discussed.

Through Response, GIFT offered the congregation new avenues of religious experience and expression. These were drawn from a broad spectrum of catechetical and liturgical responses of the Christian community.

The GIFT Program at Fort Emerson was located at the Chapel Center and it received the financial support of the Command. In addition to the Planning Council and the Catholic Chaplains, the personnel required to implement the initial stages were drawn from several areas:

1. Post Census-takers - the workers who visit new arrivals on Post to inform them of the religious programs offered were asked to give out GIFT packets when they made their house calls. The GIFT packets contained a brochure and a survey form.
2. Publicity Committee - included personnel from the Command, training brigades, and dependents who were eager to help us. With the blessing of the Post Commander, Major General Baron Von Kitty, posters were placed at the Commissary, Post Exchange, day rooms, coffee house, etc. Announcements were made in the Daily Bulletin and local newspapers. Radio and TV stations gave us coverage and neighborhood parishes supported the GIFT program in their publicity releases.
3. Faculty Members of Conception College - a local Catholic College, were contacted and invited to present special religious forums of interest to the Catholic community of Fort Emerson.
4. Other Chaplains on Post - were invited to participate in much the same manner that I had seen work so well at Fort Bliss, Texas.⁴ They would define their dogma and explain the tenets of their denomination.

Operation

Publicity volunteers distributed the GIFT brochures⁵ before and after all church services and at numerous public social functions during the month of August. The hand-outs gave a general idea of the program and the dates on which GIFT presentations would be held.

The Research Part of the GIFT Program began in September. Survey forms⁶ were distributed at all the Masses for two consecutive weeks.

Members of the congregation were asked to complete the form and return it to a Council member after Mass.

Council members and volunteers from the Publicity Committee worked together to compile the results of the survey sheets. There were twenty-five general areas of discussion listed on the survey form. Each person was asked to select the six that most interested him/her. The six topics that received the majority of the votes in this survey were to be given attention in the future. When the consensus of the Research survey was published, the Catholic community was invited to attend the Reflection sessions that were to follow.

The Reflection Part of the GIFT Program began in October. It consisted of six weekly meetings, each one focusing in on one of the major topics that were voted on in the survey. In other words, the six categories that received the most responses would be the Reflection topics of discussion of the six weeks, one topic for each wee. The Catholic Chaplains and Catholic college teachers handled this section. Attendance at these meetings was good and consistent. The topics of discussion and the manner of presentation were applauded by the congregation.

In December, we offered the Response Part of the GIFT Program. We spent one week reviewing catechetical situations using Lumen Vitae⁷ as the discussion handbook. The second week was devoted to the liturgy and was highlighted by seven different worship services. Chaplains of

all faiths and local community religious leaders participated in the Response activities in the weeks that preceded Christmas. The Celebration of Hope for the Future was the final ceremony in the GIFT presentation. It was the finale of the religious renewal project, but the start of a solid Religious Education Program here at Fort Emerson. Our gift at Christmastime was truly a Celebration of Hope for the Future.

EPILOGUE

A Religious Education Program does not exist simply to have a better-educated Catholic denomination at a military installation. We expect the spiritually-renewed and better informed Christian to live in the community as a good neighbor and a model of moral leadership. "Christ calls us to a lifestyle of faith and trust in the Lord and in the community of love. Christian values are included if they are truly being lived by the community. In other words, justice as a value cannot be 'taught' it must be lived. No school, teacher, family or community can teach justice or any other value if that value is not a living, motivating force in that school, teacher, family or community."

A Religious Education Program was offered to the congregation of Fort Emerson. It was received and accepted as a good and workable outline for personal/group spiritual renewal. The GIFT Program used the

guidelines established by the U. S. Catholic Bishops in their 1972

pastoral letter, "To Teach As Jesus Did":

"Thus one crucial measure of the success or failure of the educational ministry of the Church is how well it enables men to hear the message of hope contained in the gospel, to base their love and service of God upon this message, to achieve a vital personal relationship with Christ, and to share the gospel's realistic view of the human condition which recognizes the fact of evil and personal sin while affirming hope..."

¹U.S. Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Message on Catholic Education, "To Teach As Jesus Did", Origins (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic News Service, 1972), 2:22, p. 351.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴(COL) R. J. Wood, SOP: On the Religious Education Program, (Fort Bliss, Texas: October, 1970) pp-26-29.

⁵A sample of the GIFT Brochure is included in the Appendix, (Sample A).

⁶A sample of the GIFT Survey Form is included in the Appendix, (Sample B).

⁷J. Bouvy, ed., Lumen Vitae, (Belgium: International Center for Studies in Religious Education, 1972) XXVII:4.

⁸Charles McDonald, ed., The Living Light (Indiana: National Center of Religious Education-CCD, 1972) 10:1.

APPENDIX

- A. GIFT Brochure: Information Sheet containing explanation of GIFT Program and listing dates of meetings.
- B. GIFT Survey Form: A listing of twenty-five related areas of questions - statements - topics concerning Catholic beliefs.

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Sample A

Growth In Faith Together

G I F T

FORT EMERSON CHAPEL CENTER
POST CHAPEL
FT. EMERSON, N. Z.

RESEARCH

September 20-27 / Surveys filled out and returned to church

REFLECTION

October 11-November 14 / Participants meet weekly in reflection groups

RESPONSE

November 29-December 5 / Catechetical Week — educational sessions each evening
December 6-12 / Liturgical Week — worship services each evening
December 13 / Celebration of hope for the future

FOLLOW THROUGH will continue in the weeks and months to come



In the RESEARCH phase, the parish priests and leaders will try to learn the faith concerns of each family. This will initially be done through a "Survey of Religious Beliefs and Concerns." Each family or individual will be asked to fill one out and return it at church. The survey consists of sixty statements. Persons are asked to agree or disagree with them. The statements concern four categories: Beliefs; Prayer; Morality; Church. The replies will be collated by computer so that it will be possible to learn how men and women; the young, middle aged, and elderly; church goers and non-church goers differ on issues. The survey is meant not only to teach parish leaders the feelings of parishioners but also to help parishioners identify for themselves difficulties with faith. The survey can serve as a start. But it is impersonal. Hopefully persons will wish to discuss the issues with fellow parishioners. Hence the second phase . . .

RESEARCH



The REFLECTION phase invites persons of all ages to talk over their faith together. This will be done in small groups in homes. The parish priests, sisters, and leaders will participate but as equal members, not as leaders. The purpose of reflection groups is not so much to seek answers as to sharpen questions of faith. That is why priests and sisters are present more as listeners and fellow searchers than as resource persons. Their time for RESPONSE will come later. First it is necessary that concerns about the life of the Church and problems of faith be fully aired. There is another equally important purpose of reflection groups. It is to provide a climate of mutual trust and encouragement where persons can feel a sense of community and solidarity in facing difficulties of faith. Helping one another to make often painful transitions is a further goal of reflection groups. There issues can be sharpened and the climate of openness set for the RESPONSE phase.

REFLECTION



During the RESPONSE phase, the priests, sisters and invited resource persons will respond to the issues raised by the survey and explored in depth by reflection groups. The RESPONSE will cover two weeks. The first, Catechetical Week, will consist of educational experiences. The second, Liturgical Week, will consist of services. The three Sunday Masses which begin, end, and come between the two weeks will have readings and sermons directed to the issues chosen by parishioners. Catechetical Week may provide panels, films, lectures, debates. Liturgical Week may include contemporary forms like communal penances and bible vigils as well as traditional forms like preaching and benediction. A special event will be planned for each evening of the two weeks. The specific theme and event cannot, of course, be chosen until after the issues have emerged from RESEARCH and REFLECTION. Issues which are not addressed can be pursued through the weeks and months of FOLLOW-UP.

RESPONSE

Sample B

FORT EMERSON

CHAPEL CENTER

Following are the general categories of the concerns stemming from the Reflection Groups of GIFT. Please select six of these tonight for Immediate Response during the weeks of April 25 - May 9.

- 83 1. Sermons
- * 88 2. The Mass, Liturgy, Worship
- 76 3. The Parish (and ours in particular)
- 26 4. Directions toward Unity (Ecumenism)
- * 138 5. Birth Control
- * 95 6. Morality
- * 125 7. Catholic Schools and Religious Education
- 14 8. Virgin Mary
- 47 9. Priesthood
- 24 10. Parish Council
- 39 11. Laws of the Church
- 75 12. Communications
- 84 13. Social Concerns
- 18 14. Death and Beyond
- * 194 15. The Concept of Sin vs. The Formation and Freedom of Conscience
- 27 16. Role of the Laity
- 73 17. Sacrament of Penance and Confession
- 14 18. Abortion
- 69 19. Divorce and Remarriage
- 44 20. Church in the Modern World
- 57 21. Faith and Doubt
- * 133 22. Papal Infallibility and Church Authority

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RESEARCH



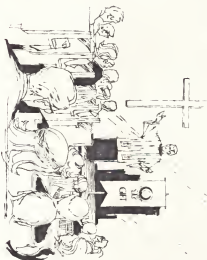
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